



- Life-TIB project success
- Biofuels – an EU change
- The state of nature in Italy
- Pavia remembers White Stork



A Kentish Plover nesting on the sand at LIPU Reserve, Ca' Roman, now protected better thanks to a donation by the ACE Foundation, see p 15.



2015 – A Review

Editorial

David Lingard

Another year comes to a close and offers a chance to reflect on twelve months of effort by our colleagues in Italy.

Our support has followed a well trodden path, but it would be wrong to see that as an admission of failure. We in the British section have helped fund the anti-poaching camps and patrols at both ends of the country and these have been successful to varying extents. Trapping of thrushes in Sardinia is declining noticeably and the shooting of raptors at the Messina Strait is a very pale shadow of what it was just two decades ago. The camps continue to ensure that these illegal practices don't have a chance to flare up again and this suppression work may have to continue for some time to come.

However, the highlight of the year must be the change in Italian law brought about by unremitting pressure from LIPU and other NGOs applied both in Rome and in Brussels. There should no longer be any loopholes, no "grey areas", no derogations to any of the Regions – no excuses, the trapping of wild birds to use as decoys is against the law. It is as clear as that.

Buon lavoro, LIPU – Well Done!

**From the
President of
LIPU**

Fulvio Mamone

THE COURAGE OF LIPU

Fulvio Mamone Capria

Dear Friends, we are coming to the end of 2015, the 50th anniversary year of LIPU. The very many successes achieved for the protection of nature are encouraging us to carry on and confront the challenges which the world puts before us. The challenge, for example, of keeping calm and clear-minded as was necessary when, one morning at the end of October, the Pavia volunteers told me that a White stork had been peppered with shot and that a few hours previously, near Modena, the same fate had been dealt out to a splendid Golden Eagle. They both died from their numerous and serious wounds. Clear and blatant crimes against nature committed by unscrupulous poachers who fully deserve a strong riposte from the same authorities who are right now dismantling the environmental protection authority and the provincial police forces! It makes you mad and yet we know that anger gets you nowhere. And so we think that, rather than getting angry, we should get the competent authorities finally to come up with a plan of action against illegal hunting, with focussed legislative sanctions and all the machinery and rigour required. We have been asking for this for some time and now we shall be asking even more strongly.

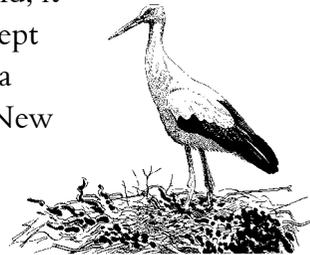


It takes inner calm, a clear head and determination as well when you discover that a member of parliament is attempting, with an amendment, hidden among a thousand others, to allow hunting all year (for wild boar, with negative repercussions on all the rest) based on the excuse of damage to agriculture, which would be dealt with via a number of other solutions. Here, too, there has been anger and concern but, above all, action which we are putting promptly into effect and which is succeeding in putting a stop to this awful proposal.

It takes calm, clear-headedness – and action too to make sure that the oases and the rescue centres do not fail through lack of financial support from the abolished local and provincial authorities. This is a problem which is becoming extremely serious and for which we are seeking your help because it is putting at grave risk the basic structures of the life, the purpose and the future of LIPU. All this, and much more besides, makes up our daily work, which goes on without a break. Problems, yes, but also great victories: community projects developed with skill, successes in the management of the oases and reserves, the treatment and release of thousands of wounded creatures from our centres, the anti-poaching watch with the courageous volunteer guards, hour upon hour of environmental education,

policies in support of agriculture and the Nature 2000 network, days spent in the squares and with the public to bring home ever more clearly our purpose. A purpose which we have told and celebrated and which will have, we are sure, a glorious future.

Those of you, our members, who have not yet been to one of our centres or have not gone to one of our organisations, do so as quickly as possible. You will find volunteers and officers ready to encourage you by teaching you to recognise the songs of birds, to go birdwatching, to help wounded wildlife, to understand the riches of nature. You will find LIPU members welcoming other LIPU members in a happy family which must grow and grow yet more again. And here, then, is my heartfelt appeal for the end of the year: renew your membership, invite others to join (there is a fantastic offer of 6 months' membership for 10 Euros), foster the passion which encourages people to save nature. Make, in a word, the world of LIPU a world even more beautiful. And, it goes without saying, accept my very best wishes for a Happy Christmas and New Year 2016. Let it be a year of peace, calm and courage.



FOCUS

by Marco Gustin, LIPU Species and Research

Italy's Nature

The Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) has published a report on the implementation of the Birds Directive in Italy, which highlights the importance of data for efficient bird conservation.

Birdwatching, censuses, monitoring. Today, the scientific study of wild birds can rely on a vast array of researchers and bird lovers who provide very useful data to understand better not only the status of species but also the effectiveness of the conservation initiatives that are being undertaken in accordance with the EU Birds Directive, which dates back to 1979 and has been recently updated.

The implementation of this directive in Italy is the object of a recent report which has been published by ISPRA with the support of the Ministry of the Environment and Protection of Land and Sea, in collaboration with LIPU-BirdLife Italy. The report contains all the data collected in Italy with respect to the conservation status, the threats posed to the species and the conservation measures adopted for the birds living in the Italian territory, with particular

attention to the nesting species and the species in the Annex I of the Birds Directive.

Health of the species

Which are the bird species that can boast good health and those that suffer the most according to the ISPRA's report?

Many of the widespread nesting populations living in forests or ecotones (that is, the border between two different ecosystems) have been increasing consistently; for example the Woodpigeon, the piciformes (woodpeckers) and some species of passeriformes, the increased number seems to be confirmed by an expansion of the reproductive range.



The substantial improvement of the environment has also had positive bottom-up food chain effects for most of the falconiformes, such as Short-toed Eagles, Peregrines, Lesser Kestrels, Buzzards and others. Several species of birds of prey have also had a remarkable recovery, especially long term, thanks to the dramatic reduction in direct and indirect killing (through the ingestion of poisoned prey, for example) and the rescue of eggs and chicks destined for falconry. All this has been possible

thanks to a tighter control of the breeding areas and, above all, to a cultural shift which finally recognises these birds as valuable as well as harmless. However, the toxic substances present in the environment and the development of infrastructures, such as electric lines and wind plants, are still a threat to these birds.

The importance of the Natura 2000 network



Those species which are in need of conservation (i.e. vulnerable species, endangered species and critically endangered species) live in a wide range of ecosystems, but most of them can be found in grassland pastures, arable lands (vegetable and cereal crops) and wetlands.

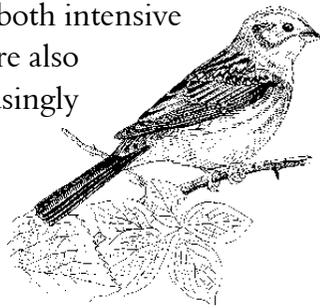
Despite the rather incomplete picture on the conservation status of the avifauna in Italy, the implementation of the Birds Directive through Natura 2000 has had a positive impact on the national conservation policies. The Directive has indeed introduced new, binding obligations for the safeguard and management of the species- among them, the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA)- thus encouraging both

a better knowledge of the bird populations (especially those included in Annex I) and their monitoring.

Many of the populations considered the most at risk due to their limited number and their reduced distribution have also enjoyed a higher level of protection. Particularly, the increase of several populations of water species, both nesting and wintering, cannot be linked but to the increased protection of the wetland areas that has taken place in the past few decades. The environmental changes in the wetlands, caused by the introduction of salt water in coastal areas, constant budget cuts and water pollution – especially in reedbeds – may worsen the status of some populations that are already rare, but also those thinly spread now which were once common.

Decrease of “farmland” species

As far as conservation is concerned, water species are not the only ones at risk. Species associated with both intensive and extensive farming are also decreasing due to increasingly intensive farming on plains and the stopping of traditional livestock rearing activities on hills and mountains.



Indeed, these factors, that are rarely studied in Italy, lead to the gradual loss of grasslands and habitats, which are ideal for nesting and feeding.

The critical role of the Birds Directive

Through the institution of SPAs, the Directive has allowed us to safeguard a wider range of species and populations, not limited just to the list on Annex I.

The conservation of the avifauna is currently regulated by an extensive and well-organised legislative framework in which the national and the European policies have had and will have a crucial role, especially through the implementation of the EU Birds Directive. However, the Directive itself implies that the achievement of conservation objectives will only be possible through the achievement of high standards in the collection and management of bird-related data.

The publication of the first report on the conservation status of the avifauna in Italy (available on www.lipu.it) was a great opportunity to monitor the changes of a big portion of the national bird heritage and guide any conservation policies.

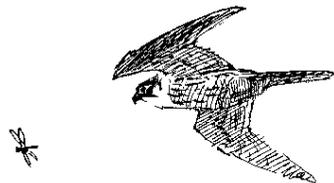
Scientists and amateurs' level of interest for birds has been high but the challenge for the

future is collecting such data in an efficient way, thus contributing towards an ever more effective control of the biodiversity status, whose evolution offers an indirect measure of the environmental health and its risks.

The checklist of the ISPRA's Report comprises 268 bird populations currently nesting in Italy, plus 44 populations of wintering species and four migratory species. There are 306 populations for a total of 277 species.

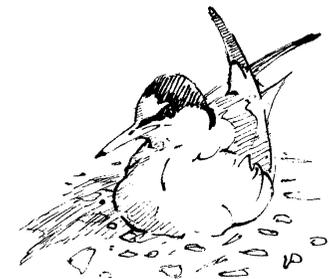
Reports have highlighted how dynamic the nesting population demographic is: a greater than 10% change has been recorded in over 50% of the species in the short term (2000-2012) and in over 60% in the longer term (1980-2012).

There is not enough information, though, on demographic trends. Therefore, it would appear that the species with a higher value from a conservation standpoint are not sufficiently monitored.



NATURA 2000 AND SPECIES SAFEGUARDS

The strategic importance of Natura 2000 is for the conservation of the more vulnerable species: Special Protection Areas (SPAs) host more than 50% of the Italian population of at least 54 of 90 nesting species included in Annex I. The 610 Italian SPAs allow both connection between the most important reproductive sites and the spreading of the protected species into areas that are yet to be colonized. Moreover, they occupy a surface of 44,075 Sq. Km., accounting for 14.6% of the national territory. Most of the SPAs are within the Mediterranean (40.2%) and Continental (40.3%) bioregions.



THANK YOU MR ACE

ACE Foundation International is donating 48,000 Euros to LIPU to protect the Venice lagoon.

- Setting: the Pisani-Moretta Palace
- Museum: the museum of Venice
- Participants: Jeff Moghrabi and our Director General, Danilo Selvaggi
- Inspiration: Kentish Plovers and Nightjars
- And the event: the handing over by the ACE Foundation of a “cheque” (about a square metre in size) with the donation for LIPU.

Why such a prestigious context in Venice? The beneficiary is our nature reserve – Ca’ Roman. This donation will help us manage the reserve this year, and for another 20 years with the collaboration of the Commune of Venice, the Province of Venice (now a metropolitan city) and of the Veneto Region Forestry Services. The manager of the LIPU Nature Reserve, Michele Pegorer, and some of our other collaborators and volunteers have committed themselves with great enthusiasm to actions and preparations for next summer.

The usual management of the protected area will continue alongside the restructuring of the Information area (the place of first contact

for visitors to Ca’ Roman, seeing that we do not have a proper visitor centre), provision of material for protecting plovers’ nests, for printing and distribution of leaflets about the natural reserve, the environment, flora and fauna. So this will be a demonstration of the importance of Ca’ Roman which will continue over the coming months and years at the local level, showing that our reserve is a little piece of the amazing and unique mosaic which is the Venice lagoon. A small tractor will be acquired in order to maintain the environment of the dunes and beaches, to restrict access by visitors to a particular area of Ca’ Roman which is a world renowned, rare and threatened habitat for *Tortulo-scabiosetum* (a dune plant which may be similar to Marram grass but which has no English name that I can find. Ed).

Finally, information panels will help visitors to appreciate the area. At Ca’ Roman as at the other LIPU reserves, visitors range from school children from Venice and Chioggia to tourists from all over the world, coming in groups, or families, or as birdwatchers. Nature lessons for the elementary schools in Pellestrina alternate with observations of terns and gulls, with hundreds and hundreds of people participating in nature events like the “Starry Night”. The stars twinkling in the background of pictures of the Palazzo Pisani-Moretta are continuing reminders of our daily efforts for this area of

Venice and its lagoon. With the continuing presence of local authorities and, of course, also of the ACE Foundation. And so, thank you, Mr Ace.

The ACE Foundation was founded in 1985, when a consortium of 34 businesses decided to create an insurance company. With its entry into the New York Stock Exchange in 1993, into Lloyd's of London in 1996 and with the acquisition of shares in Property & Casualty of Cigna in 1999, ACE became one of the main insurance and reinsurance groups in the world. ACE Group is now present in another 200 countries, whereas ACE Europe, with its central base in London, operates with its own local representatives in 19 countries, amongst which is Italy.

FROM THE ALPS TO THE APENNINES

The ecological network that links the Campo dei Fiori with the Valle del Ticino has come to completion, thanks to the work of the Life TIB project, related here by those who watched it progress.

A narrow ecological corridor.

A bridge that unites two worlds, lying between the massif of the Campo dei Fiori, Lake Maggiore and the valley of the Ticino. It is a

passageway for wildlife and the slow migrations of vegetation. But the changes wrought by humans risk cutting off this flow of life forever. Is it possible to reverse this process? For the Life TIB project, the Trans Insubria Bionet, completed thanks to the financial assistance of the EU's Life programme, the answer was, yes, it can. Let us see how.

Help for frogs and toads

Our journey begins at a peat bog in the Park of the Campo dei Fiori: Daniele and Guido are dipping a small net into the water in search of frogs and toads. They are researchers for the Life TIB project and are studying the movements and distribution of reptiles and amphibians.

According to Daniele, the loss of wetlands is one of the main causes of the loss of biodiversity in the pre-alpine zone. Frogs, toads and salamanders are concentrated in a small



number of sites, too remote from each other to allow a sufficient exchange of individuals between the populations. And without this refreshment of the gene pool extinction is only a matter of time. To avoid this outcome it was decided to intervene, mapping all the parcels of wetland in the area of the corridor. In the most important there were environmental

improvement works. “To reduce the distance from one wetland to the next - explains Guido - we dug a number of artificial ponds, and to improve the ecological quality of these habitats we planned and constructed a series of dry stone walls, given their well-known capacity for hosting in their crevices and between the stones, small mammals, reptiles such as the Smooth Snake and amphibians such as the Common Frog”.

A trap for mammals

Along the pre-alpine ecological corridor, Nicola studies the movements and the requirements for the survival of mammals. In the initial phase of the project the researchers discussed whether it was possible for humans and wildlife to live together, and whether it was even possible any more in an increasingly artificial environment. With the help of camera traps, Nicola monitored the underpasses, the most vulnerable points of the ecological network, the narrowest and most surrounded by concrete. In this way the passage of 13 species of wild mammals, from martens to badgers was recorded. A wealth of fauna unseen by the eyes of those who every day pass by the habitats where it is found, and carry on their way. Creating underpasses along the highways benefits not only mammals, both large and small, but also reptiles and above all amphibians, giving them the chance to relocate and survive.

The wood that helps insects and birds

Insects too, are they also put at risk by the fragmentation of habitats? According to Francesca, who studies the Stag Beetle and the exceptionally rare Hermit Beetle for the Life TIB project, it is the scarcity of dead wood that prevents the spread of many insects, including those mentioned. “Both of them – she says – have a life cycle tied to plants either dead or with hollow and decaying parts, inhabiting the sort of trees which are all too rare in our woodlands - the woods are always too young” The problem has been addressed through a mix of both new and traditional agronomic practices. The ring-barking of trunks and the creation of base layers of non-native plants, or the pollarding of willows, are but some of the methods of forest management that the project has undertaken with the precise goal of favouring both the adults and larvae of insects that have been declining for decades.



The effectiveness of this approach has not escaped Severino, the ornithologist of the Life TIB research group. His method of investigation is based on listening points for the identification

of birdsong in the breeding season.

Notebook in hand, Severino recorded no less than seventy species of birds along the Insubrian corridor. He then focused on certain target species: the Short-toed Treecreeper, the Marsh Tit and the majestic Black Woodpecker. “ All are species tied to saproxylic insects, that is to say those dependent on dead wood”, he says. In this way the actions of the project in the area of forest management favour both birds and insects at once, and by extension all species of other types that share the same resources. Everything in nature is related.

It is no surprise then that invasive, non-native plants such as the Lotus and the Water Primrose represent a real problem for the ecological balance of the Brabbia marshes and the Lago di Varese, sites of huge importance and treasure-houses of biodiversity for the pre-alpine corridor. Barbara studies their distribution and coordinates sometimes experimental actions for their removal, Both of them, she says, are taking over natural habitats and colonising banks and areas of open water.



A network of 50 organisations

But to the work towards a favourable outcome for the project can also be added that of the institutions. In parallel with the development of the Life TIB project described above, 50 communes in the area, coordinated by the Province of Varese, signed up to the so-called Contract for a Network, a voluntary accord to achieve an adequate level of protection for the pre-alpine corridor. The Region of Lombardy, with the Parks of the Ticino and the Campo dei Fiori, did likewise, The support of other players, such as LIPU and the Cariplo Foundation, was crucial throughout the process. And today, with



the Insubrian ecological network having become a beautiful and important reality, there is the sense of having done something good and useful for nature.

BIOFUELS – A U-TURN

*The European Parliament comes to the aid of the forests.
A good omen in the light of the coming summit on climate change.*

Many believe the summit in Paris, the 21st conference of the United Nation's convention on climate change, to be the last opportunity to reverse, or at least, slow down the warming of the planet. The climate change deniers are at last defeated and the links between the environment, biodiversity and our existence is now clear to everyone. Climate change is causing the loss of numerous species and degrading many ecosystems and we also now know only healthy, that is balanced, ecosystems are able play their part in regulating the climate. If, for instance the Amazon were to lose the characteristics of a rain forest, that capacity would be lost forever. The danger of this is anything but remote if on one hand we pay little attention to the environment while developing renewable forms of energy to replace fossil fuels. For example, when the EU offered incentives to encourage the use of biofuels it made a grave mistake that proved costly for the environment.

Despite the early warnings of the damage caused by such practices the EU chose to continue to finance a new, so-called, sustainable sector to expand that of biofuels. So, outside Europe,

the need for space for palm oil, maize and rape, used to produce bioethanol and biodiesel, has resulted in more destruction of natural forests. Now, however, after a political battle lasting five years and the gathering of evidence about the impact of these practices, the European parliament has, at last, abandoned its support for the first generation unsustainable biofuels and has laid the foundation for a new sustainable transport policy. In view of this decision we can but hope that the Paris summit will, as a first step mobilise every country to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and put a stop to senseless destruction of natural habitats, especially tropical rain forests.

The means and the money are there. The Forest Carbon Partnership is a mechanism for financing the maintenance of forests as a means of storing carbon. We await decisions from Paris that are good for our future and that of the natural world in all its diversity.

FROM THE WORLD OF LIPU.

Polieco award for LIPU

The award that goes to an Association that has distinguished itself in the conservation sector in Italy this year has been awarded to LIPU. The

president of the Polieco consortium, Enrico Bobbio, and its director, Claudia Salvestrini, have awarded this award to LIPU President Fulvio Mamone Capria during the international meeting on the economy of wastes in 2015, held in September on Ischia. An exhibition on “Biodiversity under siege – wastes, neglect and degradation: wounded Nature” had also taken place to highlight the collaboration between the Polieco consortium and LIPU, with the aim of making the general public aware of the threats of pollution to the natural environment and the difficult equilibrium between wildlife and modern society. The cooperation between Polieco and LIPU aims to build a new ecological culture by promoting awareness, environmental education and sustainability.

Happy 30th birthday to the Centro Cicogne (Centre for Storks) of Racconigi

Nobody missed the party for the 30th anniversary of the LIPU-affiliated Centro Cicogne e Anatidi (Centre for Storks and ducks) of Racconigi, Piedmont. The Vaschetti family, headed by Bruno, his wife Francesca and their daughters Gabriella, Enrica and Lorenza, organised a well-attended meeting to recount the first steps, back in 1985, of this Centre which re-introduced the White Storks in Italy, where the species had been extinct. From the first positive results on Storks, the Centre extended its work

to ducks in 1989, to protect rare and threatened species of waterfowl. It was within this context that LIPU started the re-introduction of the White-headed Duck, a diving duck that had been extinct in Italy since the 1970s. Since 1995 the Centre has supported the development of wetlands as stop-over sites of migratory birds, in particular waders, such as small plovers, which visit the mudflats. Happy birthday again to the Centre and to the White Storks in Italy! For visits and information please call 0039 0172 83457.

The 6,000 birds of prey of St George mountain pass.

Over 6,000 birds of prey were seen during the 22nd camp on Colle St George on the Colli Asolani, organised by the LIPU Pedemontana Trevigiana and by Asfve (Wildlife association of the Veneto region). During 22 days 6,073 birds of prey were recorded, of which 5,978 Honey Buzzards, 69 Common Buzzards, 9 Marsh harriers, 2 Ospreys, 7 Black Kites and 6 Sparrowhawks, as well as 14 Black Storks. Giancarlo Silveri, delegate of LIPU Pedemontana Trevigiana commented that “We had half of the numbers we used to have on the best years, when 12,000 individuals were seen, due to the warm wet weather which has moved migratory raptors towards other routes”

The Stork, the city Mayor and the flag.

Poaching can also be fought through solidarity. The Mayor and the city council of Torre d'Isola, in the Pavia province, erected the LIPU flag following a poaching incident involving a White Stork in their area, as a sign of solidarity with the species and to show support for LIPU. A White Stork had been found suffering from shotgun wounds in one of the ditches near the city on 17 October.

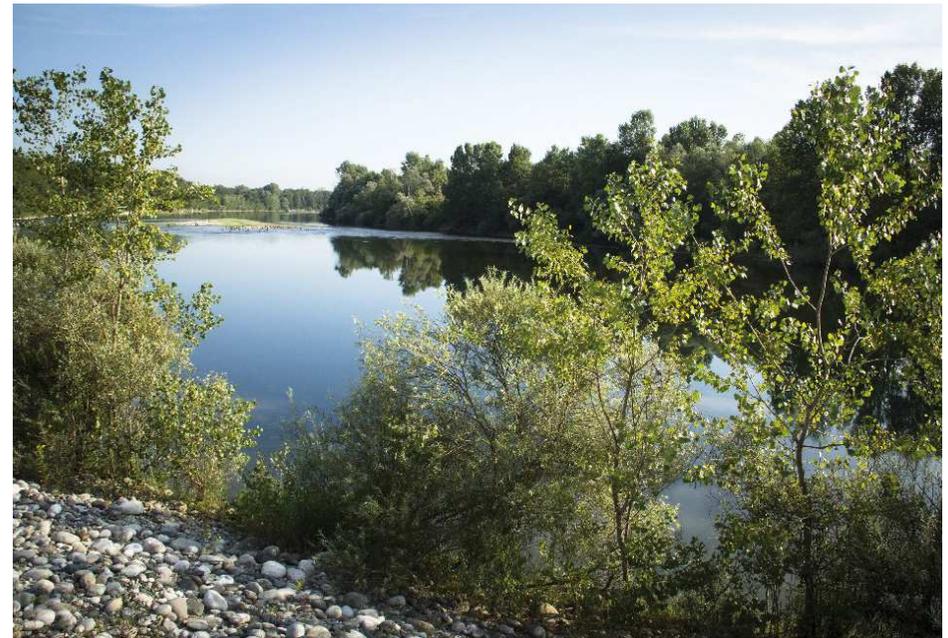
The stork had been rescued with the help of fire fighters, and volunteers from LIPU Pavia had brought it to the Rescue Centre "La Fagiana" at Pontevecchio di Magenta, where, unfortunately, the stork died soon after its arrival, from the severity of its wounds. However, for once, faced with such an incomprehensible and brutal act, civic solidarity showed more strength than violence.

My thanks to the translators of this issue:
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Giusy Fazzina, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

Line drawings are used by kind permission of
the EU and RSPB.



The Life - TIB project in the Ticino Natural Park. A typical underpass for wildlife *Photo: Massimo Soldarini* and, below, a view of the Ticino *Photo: M Tessaro*



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The Town Hall at Torre d'Isola near Pavia where the Mayor flew the LIPU flag in a gesture of solidarity with LIPU after the senseless killing of a White Stork.